

# TFACTS is a pricey failure

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The Tennessee Department of Children's Services is tasked with, among other thing, tracking children in the state's care, maintaining a database on cases of child abuse and neglect, monitoring the state's foster care system, and making sure that payments to foster care parents are made quickly and accurately. Such serious responsibilities require a sophisticated computer system.

A capable computer system is particularly important for DCS, given that a dozen years ago, a federal court order required that Tennessee develop a system to monitor the state's foster care system after a number of problems were revealed, including placing young children in emergency shelters for months on end.

In 2008, then-Gov. Phil Bredesen and then-DCS Commissioner Viola Miller, sought to create a computer system that could address DCS's monitoring needs. That system became known as the Tennessee Family and Child Tracking System (TFACTS). Like so many thing championed by Gov. Bredesen, TFACTS came at a surprisingly high cost. When it was finally unveiled in 2010, the price tag for TFACTS exceeded \$27 million.

Despite the system's expense, TFACTS has been a tremendous failure. It has put children in jeopardy, shortchanged foster parents and placed the state at risk of being out of federal compliance with the court order.

According to the Tennessean, "the computer system... has been blamed for a variety of problems that include skipped payments to foster parents and the inability to find a particular child's history when a brand-new report of abuse or neglect is received."

Some of the problems identified with the system include:

- Skipped payments and improper payments to foster parents and agencies totaling \$2.5 million.
- An increased backlog of overdue investigations into reports of child abuse or neglect because caseworkers were unable to update the computer to reflect closed cases.
- A failure to retrieve cases of abuse or neglect because the system confused children with similar names, such as siblings, making it difficult for Child Protective Service workers to perform their duties.

In total, fixing the more than 1,700 defects identified in the system is expected to cost state taxpayers \$3.96 million. While workers are rushing to repair TFACTS, 500 defects remain.

It's unfortunate that problems associated with the defective computer system fell in the laps of current DCS Commissioner Kate O'Day and Gov. Bill Haslam -- both of whom came into office years after the system was approved and months after its launch. It's even worse for Tennessee's taxpayers who already shelled out \$27 million to build the faulty system and are now having to foot the bill for the nearly \$4 million in fixes necessary to make the computer system adequately serve our state's children.

In the private sector, if a consumer pays for a defective good, a refund is expected. The same should be true when tax dollars are wasted because the government is ripped off by a contractor who doesn't deliver a working product.

The state attorney general has the opportunity to pursue legal action against Dynamics Research Corp., the Massachusetts contractor responsible for the TFACTS system. It's clear that Dynamics Research Corp. should pay to fix its mistake, not taxpayers.

Here's hoping that the Tennessee Attorney General's office fights the legal battle necessary to refund the tax dollars spent to bring TFACTS up to snuff. More importantly, here's hoping that the failures of the TFACTS system have not resulted in the abuse or neglect of any of Tennessee's children.

